2005 ALABAMA CHILDREN'S NEEDS ASSESSMENT

Introduction

This is the fifth year that Children's Policy Councils (CPC) from across the state have submitted Needs Assessments to the State Children's Policy Council. The Needs Assessment serves several very important purposes. It fulfills a legal responsibility of both the county Children s Policy Councils and the Alabama Children s Policy Council. It serves as an avenue for a county to identify the issues that are affecting our children's lives and ability to grow into productive citizens. It also gives the members of the council a link to policy makers in Montgomery and Washington. Needs Assessments are reviewed by agencies and legislators to learn what is needed and where priorities should be placed. Additionally, Children s Policy Councils consistently report that the most valuable benefit of the Needs Assessment is the local communication and planning that it fosters.

> *Increase awareness of Children s Policy Council among parents and citizens on children s issues, needs and available resources.*
> Autauga County Children s Policy Council

In 2004, the Elmore County Children s Policy Council identified the need for a Famliy Resource Center as their top priority and identified Substance Abuse Prevention as an issue in the Health Category. Over the past year the council has opened the doors of the Elmore County Family Resource Center and received a grant for Substance Abuse Prevention totalling $750,000 over the next three years.

This year, all 67 of the Alabama s counties submitted Needs Assessments.

> *State funding sources should require the use of evidence-based prevention/intervention models or award additional points for applications that use such proven effective models..*
> Mobile County Children s Policy Council

The format of the Needs Assessment was developed by a committee of county CPC representatives and child advocates. It is designed to promote discussion in a broad range of categories that affect children's lives, provide information to state agencies, and serve as a starting point for a strategic plan. This year the format was streamlined to simplify the process and reduce duplication.

The Needs Assessment has four parts: Part I asks councils to identify Issues and Action Steps in six categories; Part II provides an opportunity to make Policy Recommendations that are forwarded to state agencies and the Legislature; Part III requires the council to narrow the issues to the top three priority outcomes for children in the county; and Part IV is an evaluation.

Alabama law requires that Children's Policy Councils submit their Needs Assessments by July 1st of each year and that the State Children's Policy Council prepare this compiled report by October 1. The Department of Children's Affairs utilized a standardized list of descriptions to label and compare the county Issues and Priorities. Reports are prepared for several state agencies with the Policy Recommendations from the councils that are relevant to that agencies mission. The Department of Children s Affairs staff work with the counties and agencies on many of these recommendations to build better communication and facilitate positive outcomes.

What is a Children's Policy Council?

Children s Policy Councils were created in each county in 2000 (Code of Alabama, Sec. 12-15-133) to assess the needs of children in the county and to build cooperation between various entities and interest groups. The ultimate goal for the creation of the Children's Policy Council system is to mobilize providers of services for children and involve them working collaboratively to develop a community service plan which addresses the needs of children (ages 0 to 19). By empowering community decision makers with necessary knowledge and a coordinated plan, problematic issues regarding children can be resolved. The county CPC is chaired by the local Juvenile Judge and has 15 mandated members plus seven members at-large. The legislative mandate of the CPC is to meet at least quarterly, to set policy and procedures for children's services, to identify gaps in services, to encourage agency collaboration in order to avoid duplication of services, to conduct an annual Needs Assessment for the needs of children in the community and to maintain a list of local resources for children's services for their county. The membership of the CPC is a diverse cross section of public and private individuals interested in improving children s lives.

April Knight is the Mental Health Prevention Coordinator at North West Mental Health Center. She assisted four of the councils on which she served to bring Parent Project to their counties and helped each county apply for Substance Abuse Prevention Grants.

Pam Solomon chairs the Education Committee of the Houston County Children s Policy Council. She led a reading initiative for the CPC named "Sir Read A Lot" that collected over 1500 books.

Officer James Orr, a member of the Tallapoosa County CPC, brought the entire community together for the Every 15 Minutes program for Benjamin Russell High School.

Judicial Perspective
Juvenile Judge - Chair
Chief Juvenile Probation Officer
District Attorney

Legislative Perspective
Local Legislators
County Commissioner

Public Safety Perspective
Department of Public Safety*
Alcoholic Beverage Control Board*
Sheriff

Social Services Perspective
Department of Human Resources
Dept. of Mental Health and Mental Retardation
Department of Youth Services
Department of Rehabilitation Services*
Medicaid Agency*
Superintendent of Education
Department of Public Health

Community Perspective
Seven additional members from:
State and local government officials
Practicing attorneys
Community organizations
Business and industry leaders
Representatives of any other agencies or organizations providing services to families and children in the county.

* If physical presence in county

Judge Paul Sherling has revived the Coffee County CPC. Last year it was the only council not to submit a needs assessment. This year the council is developing a training on cyber bullying and has started a truancy initiative.

Cynthia Weaver, Executive Director for the Mobile CPC, has been instrumental in working with the council to make Mobile a Community That Cares.

Susan Cochran, VISTA Volunteer for Lee County, has worked diligently to activate her CPC Committees. They now have targeted goals and have formed a youth advisory committee.

Cindy Moses, Executive Director for Morgan County Children s Policy Council, has initiated a faith-based and Hispanic community initiative within the CPC.

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VISTA

The Department of Children s Affairs applied for and received a grant which formed a partnership between AmeriCorps/VISTA and DCA. This grant allowed for fifteen fully funded positions to assist county Children s Policy Councils.

In November 2004, the first VISTAs received national training in Atlanta and in December attended CPC specific training from DCA. The fifteen VISTAs serve seventeen Children s Policy Councils. In less than a year these VISTAs have raised over $1,000,000 in grants for their communities and have generated hundreds of hours of volunteer service and thousands of dollars worth of in-kind donations.

The VISTA volunteers serve as the Council Coordinators. They coordinate meetings, draft minutes, help committee chairs keep up with the work of their committees and serve as the go to person who can get things done.

Mission
...to provide VISTA Volunteers for the purpose of increasing the capacity of the councils to eliminate poverty and improve services to children birth to nineteen

The contract with VISTA extends over three years. We expect the contract to be revised to allow additional VISTAs to come on board through a cost share program where the community would pay a portion of the cost and Americorp would fund the remaining cost.
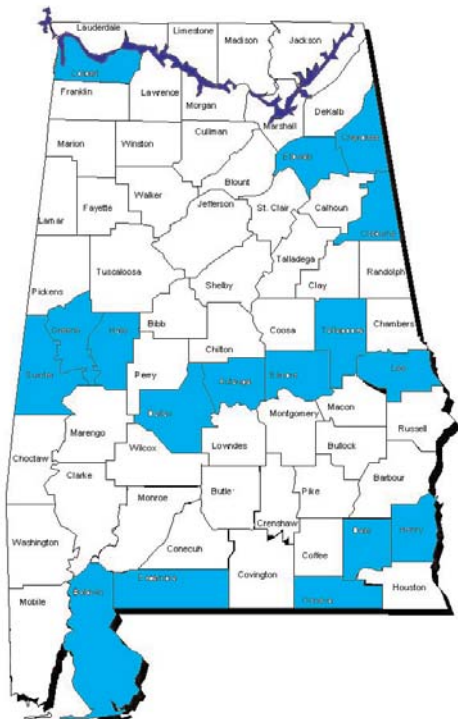
The Department of Children s Affairs serves as the central point of contact for the project. We provide job specific training, coordinate reporting, provide technical assistance as needed, and serve as the project supervisor.

Susan has done an excellent job this year and we are most appreciative of your assistance obtaining this grant!..
Judge Richard Lane
Lee County Children s Policy Council

Accomplishments

Written and received numerous grants for programs ranging from Substance Abuse Prevention to Teen Pregnancy to Children s Health. Grant totals have surpassed $1,000,000.

Assisted councils develop bylaws, member orientation manuals, resource directories, and newletters.

Have been the key to the implementation of several programs sponsored by Children s Policy Councils.

Have coordinated local training on CPC management and Grant Writing.

In the short time she has been with us she has already set in motion a program that will improve the health of children of Cleburne County and enable them to be ready for Kindergarten.
Cleburne County Children s Policy Council

Structure of the Needs Assessment

PART I - Assessment and Planning

Part I of the assessment is divided into six categories. Issues will be identified for each of the six categories.

Issues are the primary concerns or problems facing children in the county. At least two issues should be identified for each category. For example, the Health committee may determine that "Births to Unmarried Teens" and "Adequate Health Insurance" are the two primary issues. Once a council has identified the issues facing the county, it lists concrete Action Steps that the CPC can accomplish. These actions can be major or minor steps; they can be short or long term. This is the first step towards developing a Strategic Plan for the council.

The most effective method of completing this section is through committees. Many council have developed committees for each category and rely on the committees to draft the Issues and Action Steps for that category.

It opened dialogue between community leaders concerning these very important issues and caused us to work together to help solve them.
Bullock County Children s Policy Council

Categories

Health - Children's physical and mental well-being in the county.

Safety - Children live free of abuse, neglect, crime, and drugs.

Education - Children learn the skills necessary to become productive citizens.

Economic Security - Children grow up in a financially stable home where each child's basic needs can be met.

Early Care and Education - Children (0 - 5) are provided opportunities to fully develop emotionally, socially, physically, and cognitively and are ready to succeed.

Parent Involvement and Skills--Parents and guardians participation and effectiveness in fostering an environment for children to become mature, responsible and independent adults.

PART II - Policy Recommendations

Policy Recommendations are listed that would help the county address the needs of children. This may include specific policy changes for state agencies or specific changes to legislation to:

(1) improve the way services are provided,

(2) eliminate road blocks or red tape that hinder quality services, or

(3) provide for local flexibility in state programs.

Allow Children Facilitation Teams to use local funds for assessment and evaluation..
Tuscaloosa County Children s Policy Council

PART III - Priorities

Once the Issues, Action Steps, and Recommendations have been developed for each category the council then identifies the three priorities for the county's children. This is when the council members must decide which are the most pressing issues. Priorities should be stated as "Desired Outcomes," in positive language, and can reflect issues identified in Part I or may be overriding themes that cross over various categories. These outcomes should reflect the council priorities for itself, its members, and the community for the next year.

Some of the counties number 1 priorities were:

All children will have parents who are knowledgeable of good parenting practices, age appropriate supervision and discipline techniques, and parent/child communication skills.

To decrease the rampant use and manufacturing of crystal methamphetamine.

Support initiatives for a countywide educational, technical alternative school (not disciplinary).

Provide educational programs through the local schools and churches for preventive education for the use of drugs, alcohol and tobacco.

Local inpatient mental health crisis beds and substance abuse impatient treatment is available to all children in need.

Fund local Family Resource Centers and Executive Director positions.

Provide programs and literature to parents to educate them on the importance of understanding and meeting the needs of their children at a young age in the prevention of health, education, and legal problems later in life.

Participation in our Children's Policy Council will improve.

Families and agencies will have optimal knowledge and access to available services.

Descriptions for Issues and Priorities

In order to help identify consistencies between local needs assessments a common set of descriptive terms has been developed. Councils select a Description from the list below for each Issue and Priority they submit. The Department of Children s Affairs uses this to group like issues or priorities.

Mental Health
- Substance Abuse Prevention
- Substance Abuse Treatment In-Patient
- Substance Abuse Treatment Out-Patient
- Inpatient Treatment for Mental Illness
- Outpatient Treatment for Mental Illness
- Service for Mental Retardation
- Crisis (Emergency) Mental Health Services
- Mental Health Awareness
- Transportation to Mental Health Services.

Child Health
- Child Health Preventative Services
- Dental Services
- Health Insurance
- Primary Health Care
- Teen Pregnancy
- Newborn Issues (birth weight, SIDS, etc.)
- Transportation to Medical Appointments
- Specialized Medical Care
- Emergency Medical Care
- Health Education
- Nutrition and Eating Disorders Including Obesity
- Physical Activity and Exercise
- Sexually Transmitted Diseases
- Prenatal Care

Parent and Guardians
- Poor Family Supervision
- Poor Family Discipline
- Parental Attitudes Favoring Anti-Social Behavior
- Single Parent Homes
- Child Support
- Non-Custodial Parent Issues
- Non-Parental Role Models
- After School Activities and Supervision
- Respite for Parents of Special Needs Children

Juvenile Justice
- Juvenile Violent Crime
- Juvenile Property Crime
- CHINS
- Juvenile Detention Space
- Lack of Local Programs for Juvenile Delinquents
- Delinquency Prevention

Safety
- Child Abuse and Neglect
- Prevalence of Drugs
- Gang Involvement
- Availability of Firearms
- Motor Vehicle Safety
- Bicycle Safety
- Suicide
- Youth Violence and Bullying
- Sexual Assault

Community Collaboration
- Collaboration Between Public Partners
- Collaboration Between Public and Private Partners
- Collaboration Between Private Partners
- Information Sharing
- Family Resource Center

Young Children (0-5)
- School Readiness (Ready for Kindergarten or 1st Grade)
- Availability of Child Care
- Quality of Child Care
- Child Care Subsidies for Low-Income Parents
- Awareness of Brain Development in Young Children
- Coordination of Services for Young Children
- Pre-School
- Pre-Kindergarten
- Standards and Accreditation of Programs for Children Under 6

Education
- High School Graduation
- Alternative Education
- After School Enrichment
- Job Training
- Literacy
- Quality Schools
- School Funding
- School Safety
- GED
- Vocational Education

Economic Opportunities
- Availability of Employment
- Summer Jobs Programs
- Rural Economic Development

Other
- Mental Health Concerns for Juvenile Delinquents
- Victim Advocacy
- Funding
- Sustainability for Existing Programs
- Other

Recommendations

Recommendations to the Governor and Legislature

1. Provide the necessary resources for state and local agencies to develop and implement substance abuse prevention, intervention, and treatment services for children and youth. Continue to support the leadership that has been established through the Alabama Commission for the Prevention and Treatment of Substance Abuse.

2. Support the further development of the Family Resource Center concept and its role in prevention and accessible family services.

3. Financial and technical support should be given to local Children s Policy Councils, juvenile courts, school systems, and social service agencies for implementing evidence based parenting programs.

4. Add Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention to the curriculum and to continuing education requirements for teachers and early childhood educators.

5. Develop and implement a coordinated teen pregnancy prevention program utilizing collaboration between Children s Policy Councils, the Alabama Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy, state agencies, and others, as appropriate.

6. Provide funding and support for the development and maintenance of the Alabama Resource Management System. (Resource Directory)
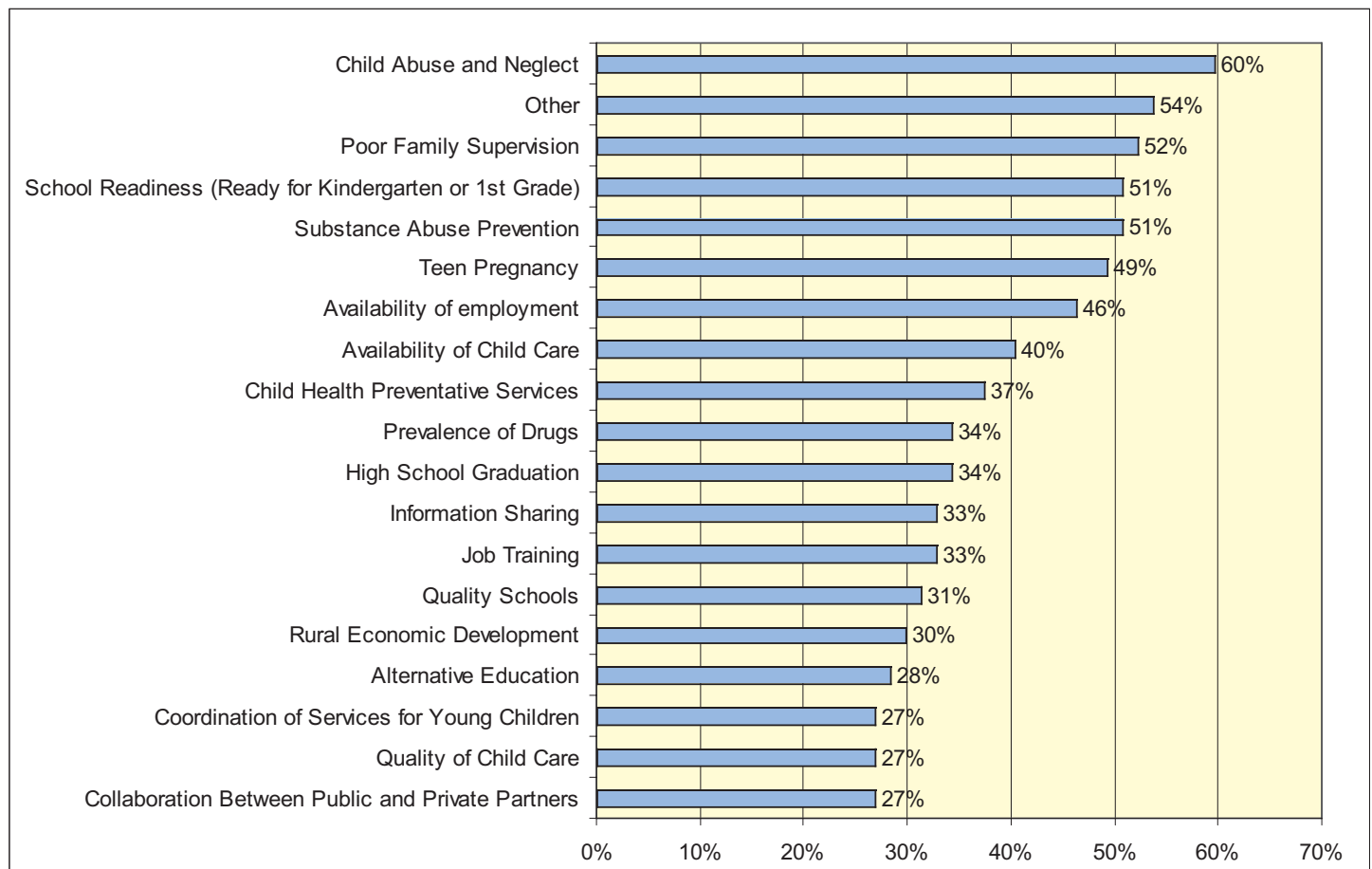
It shall be the duty of the Alabama Children's Policy Council and the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court to review the report prepared by the Department of Children's Affairs pursuant to Section 12-15-134 and to make such recommendations as it deems necessary and appropriate to the Governor and Legislature by October 1 of each fiscal year.

Code of Alabama Section 12-15-130(c)

Issues

One of the first steps in the Needs Assessment process is the identification and discussion of issues in each of the six categories. This is often done though committees established by the council. Issues are the primary concerns or problems that put children at risk. Discussion in the committee will often identify several issues and the committee will narrow the list down to the two to three most important issues. The Department of Children s Affairs provides councils with a list of Descriptions that to help to label the issues.

Issues are designed to reflect the needs of the children in the community. A total of 1008 issues were identified. This represents a 37% increase over 2004. Issues are grouped by the assigned Description and DCA reports the percentage of counties that had at least one issue with that description.

Issue	Percent
Child Abuse and Neglect	60%
Other	54%
Poor Family Supervision	52%
School Readiness (Ready for Kindergarten or 1st Grade)	51%
Substance Abuse Prevention	51%
Teen Pregnancy	49%
Availability of employment	46%
Availability of Child Care	40%
Child Health Preventative Services	37%
Prevalence of Drugs	34%
High School Graduation	34%
Information Sharing	33%
Job Training	33%
Quality Schools	31%
Rural Economic Development	30%
Alternative Education	28%
Coordination of Services for Young Children	27%
Quality of Child Care	27%
Collaboration Between Public and Private Partners	27%

Lack of transportation for children to receive health/medical care in or out of the county.
Choctaw County Children s Policy Council

Coordinated Intervention for parent and child when child is identified at risk for developmental or educational failure.
Colbert County Children s Policy Council

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Top Issues in Each Category
(Number of counties including issue in each category.)

Look at the effect of licensing standards and how it relates to parental choices and health and safety of all children

Baldwin County
Children s Policy Council

Increase financial support for Family Resource Center.

Elmore County
Children s Policy Council

Early Care and Education

School Readiness	32
Availability of Child Care	20
Quality of Child Care	18
Coordination of Services for Young Children	17
Other	10

Encourage education and training for local business and industry

Bullock County
Children s Policy Council

Continue to expand parenting kits to include web-based resources

Montgomery County
Children s Policy Council

Health

Teen Pregnancy	29
Child Health Preventative Services	23
Substance Abuse Prevention	20
Nutrition and Eating Disorders	13
Health Insurance	12

Expand mental health services to children and adolescents including access to quality residential treatment for children and adolescents with major mental health issues.

Pike County
Children s Policy Council

Economic Security

Availability of Employment	31
Rural Economic Development	19
Job Training	16
Other	12
Availability of Child Care	7
Collaboration Between Public and Private Partners	7

Develop and promote parental involvement activities that empower parents and teach social and leadership skills so that parents will partner with school staff and feel more comfortable visiting the school setting.

Greene County
Children s Policy Council

Safety

Child Abuse and Neglect	34
Prevalence of Drugs	21
Substance Abuse Prevention	17
Youth Violence and Bullying	13

Children should be free of domestic violence, child abuse, and sexual abuse.

Montgomery County
Children s Policy Council

Education

High School Graduation	23
Quality Schools	21
Alternative Education	16
Other	10
School Safety	10

Promote and support resources to assist in identifying academic and behavioral difficulties.
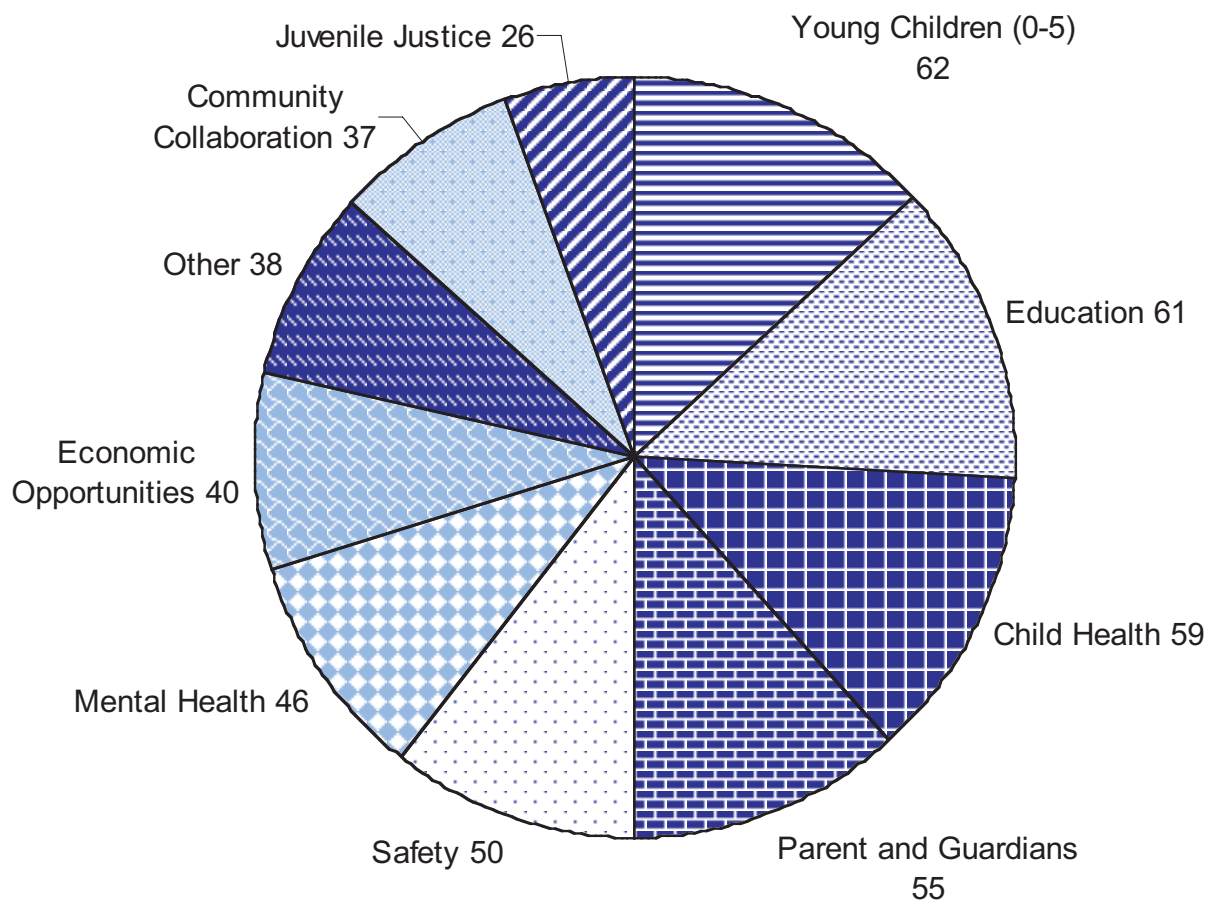
Walker County
Children s Policy Council

Parent Involvement and Skills

Poor Family Supervision	30
Information Sharing	10
Parental Attitudes Favoring Anti-Social Behavior	9
Poor Family Discipline	9
Collaboration Between Public and Private Partners	7
Delinquency Prevention	3

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If you further group the issues identified into broader categories you can determine what general areas counties were identifying as issues. Ninety Three Percent (62) of counties identified issues related to Young Chidren. Issues related to Education and Child Health were also mention by 91% and 88% respecitively. The only area not identified by at least half of the counties was Juvenile Justice.

Number of Counties Identifying Issues in Each Area

Pie chart labels:
- Juvenile Justice 26
- Community Collaboration 37
- Other 38
- Economic Opportunities 40
- Mental Health 46
- Safety 50
- Young Children (0-5) 62
- Education 61
- Child Health 59
- Parent and Guardians 55

2002			2003	
Descriptive Group	**Perct.**		**Descriptive Group**	**Perct.**
Child Health Issues	64%		Child Health Issues	72%
Substance Abuse Prevention	48%		Delinquency Prevention	66%
Information System	43%		Job Training	64%
Delinquency Prevention	43%		Parenting Involvement and Skills	64%
Teen Pregnancy	39%		Access to Childcare	61%
Parenting Involvement and Skills	39%		Substance Abuse Prevention	56%

This year in an effort to remove duplication and improve the Needs Assessment process the Department of Children s Affairs made two significant changes to the Needs Assessment Format. First, the Descriptions used to categorize Issues and Priorities were changed. The previous list lacked effective detail and included similarities in the Categories which generated validity problems with rankings due to disproportionate advantage paid to some categories.

Second, the Program Recommendations were deleted and Policy Recommendations were moved from Part I with the Issues and placed in Part II. This change prevented duplication within committees and removed duplication of analysis between Issues and program recommendations. In the past DCA has utilized the Program Recommendations and Issues to gauge interest in various areas. This year only the issues were analyzed. The Policy Recommendations were not statistically analyzed because their intent is to gather suggestions for changes to legislation or policies. Policy Recommendations are forwarded to the specific agencies that deal with the issue addressed.

The spreadsheet at the bottom of this page and the previous page allows for analysis of changes from year to year. The information for 2002, 2003, and 2004 was taken from analysis of the Program Recommendations. The information for 2005 was taken from the issues. Additionally the Descriptions were significantly changed from 2004 to 2005. Counties were given additional options and in several cases options from previous years were not available. For example, Parenting Involvement and Skills was divided into several different Descriptions in 2005 in order to allow counties to be more specific in describing the issue. The change did create a large number of other categories as counties struggled to choose from a more specific list. The Department of Children s Affairs did not change the Descriptions listed by counties unless the Description used was not from the list or no choice was made. In this case DCA attempted to pick the most appropriate Description.

In 2005 Child Abuse and Neglect was the top issue being mentioned by 60% of councils. Last year Child Abuse and Neglect was chosen as an Issue by 45% of the councils and in Recommendations by only 25% of counties.

2004		2005	
Descriptive Group	**Perct.**	**Descriptive Group**	**Perct.**
Parenting Involvement and Skills	75%	Child Abuse and Neglect	60%
Substance Abuse Prevention	57%	Other	54%
Child Health Issues	56%	Poor Family Supervision	52%
Job Training	56%	Substance Abuse Prevention	51%
Access to Childcare	52%	School Readiness	51%
School Readiness	51%	Teen Pregnancy	49%

Priorities

Sixty Four counties listed the top priorities for their council and county in the coming year. These priorities were analyzed based upon the Descriptions selected by the county.

In analyzing the priorities, weight was given to the higher priorities. Top priorities were given three points, second priorities were given two points, and third priorities were given one point. This was totaled to get the Weighted Value. Counties were limited to their top three priorities.

By limiting the responses to the top three and applying more value to the higher priorities we are able to see what is most important in the view of the Children s Policy Councils. Substance Abuse Prevention ranked fourth in the issues this year but was clearly the top priority among the councils. Family Resource Centers was not among the top issues, but when it came down to the priorities it finished a strong second. Both Substance Abuse Prevention and Family Resource Centers were the top priority for nine CPCs.

Description	Weighted Value	Total Number
Substance Abuse Prevention	49	23
Family Resource Center	38	15
Poor Family Supervision	31	16
Child Abuse and Neglect	22	10
Other	21	10
Delinquency Prevention	16	9
Information Sharing	14	9

Number of Priorities in Each Area

Juvenile Justice 13
Young Children (0-5) 20
Community Collaboration 29
Education 18
Child Health 24
Other 19
Parent and Guardians 22
Economic Opportunities 5
Mental Health 26
Safety 17

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